

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A bill acceptor for a gaming machine, the bill acceptor comprising

a receiving zone for receiving a bill;

a sensing device at an input region of the receiving zone for sensing at least one characteristic of the bill;

a controller in communication with the sensing device for receiving an output signal from the sensing device the controller inducing the bill acceptor to accept or reject the bill received of the receiving zone dependent on the output signal, the controller monitoring over a plurality of bill insertions a bill acceptance rate of the bill acceptor; and

an annunciator controlled by the controller to be activated when a the bill acceptance rate of monitored by the controller over the plurality of bill insertions drops below a predetermined threshold, the annunciator being arranged in the receiving zone.

2. (Original) The bill acceptor of claim 1, in which the receiving zone incorporates a platen on which the bill is received and a slot at an end of the platen into which the bill is to be inserted.

3. (Original) The bill acceptor of claim 2, in which the sensing device is arranged inwardly of the slot.

4. (Original) The bill acceptor of claim 1, in which the sensing device senses at least one of optical, magnetic and dimensional characteristics of the bill.

5. (Previously Presented) The bill acceptor of claim 2, in which the receiving zone includes an indicator for indicating to a patron where the bill is to be inserted into the slot.

6. (Previously Presented) The bill acceptor of claim 5, in which the indicator comprises an array of illuminating elements arranged in the platen of the receiving zone.

7. (Previously Presented) The bill acceptor of claim 6, in which the illuminating elements function as the annunciator.

8. (Original) The bill acceptor of claim 7, in which the controller causes the array of illuminating elements to be illuminated in a predetermined, first pattern and the annunciator is implemented in the form of an illumination of the illuminating elements in a second, different pattern.

9. (Original) The bill acceptor of claim 8, in which the second pattern is activated after completion of the first pattern when the bill acceptance rate has dropped below said predetermined threshold.

10. (Previously Presented) The bill acceptor of claim 1, in which, when the controller is connected to a network, a network monitoring system monitors the acceptance rate of bills by the controller and activates an alarm when the acceptance rate drops below the predetermined threshold.

11. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a bill acceptor of a gaming machine, the method ~~including the steps of~~ comprising:

sensing at least one characteristic of each of a bill plurality of bills inserted into the bill acceptor and using at least one of the sensed characteristics as a basis for a decision whether to accept or reject the inserted bill;

monitoring a bill acceptance rate ~~by a controller of the bill acceptor over a plurality of bill insertions;~~ and

automatically activating an annunciator arranged in a receiving zone of the bill acceptor when the bill acceptance rate over the plurality of bill insertions drops below a predetermined threshold.

12. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 11, further comprising energising illuminating elements of the bill acceptor in a predetermine pattern and, when the bill acceptance rate drops below the threshold, energising the illuminating elements in a second, different pattern, the second pattern of illumination of the illuminating elements serving as the annunciator.

13. (Original) The method of claim 12, in which the second pattern of illumination of the illuminating elements follows completion of the first pattern.

14. (Original) The method of claim 11, which includes transmitting a signal on a network to which the gaming machine is connected to a network monitoring system to activate an alarm means when the bill acceptance rate drops below said predetermined threshold.

15. (Currently Amended) A gaming machine network comprising:
a plurality of gaming machines wherein each gaming machine includes:
a bill acceptor that has a receiving zone for receiving tendered bills;

a sensing device; and

an annunciator arranged in the receiving zone to be and activated when a bill acceptance rate of the ~~annunciator~~ bill acceptor that has been determined over a plurality of bill insertions drops below a predetermined threshold, wherein the gaming machine networks receives signals from a sensing device of the bill acceptor so as to be able to ascertain the bill acceptance rate.

16. (Previously Presented) The gaming machine network of Claim 15, wherein each of the plurality of gaming machines includes a controller that is in communication with the sensing device and wherein the controller determines a bill acceptance rate of the tendered bills and communicates the bill acceptance rate to the gaming machine network.

17. (Cancelled)

18. (Currently Amended) The gaming machine network of Claim 15, wherein an annunciator is provided at each of the gaming machines.

19. (New) A gaming machine comprising:

a bill acceptor for receiving bills tendered, the bill acceptor comprising a sensor for evaluating each inserted bill after it has been inserted in the bill acceptor and outputting a signal which is used by the gaming machine to determine whether to accept or reject that bill;

an annunciator; and

a controller that maintains a first counter and a second counter, the controller incrementing the first counter on each occurrence that the gaming machine accepts a bill that has been inserted into the bill acceptor and incrementing the second counter on each occurrence that the gaming machine rejects a bill that has been inserted into the bill acceptor, the controller further computing a bill acceptance rate using the first and second counters as inputs to the computation and activating the annunciator when the computed bill acceptance rate falls below a predefined value, and wherein the bill acceptor continues to receive and evaluate each inserted bill regardless of the value of the computed bill acceptance rate.

20. (New) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the annunciator is arranged in an area of the bill acceptor that receives bills and is visible external of the gaming machine.

21. (New) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the predefined value is set to a value so that the annunciator is activated when at least 10% of bills have been rejected.

22. (New) The gaming machine of claim 21, wherein the predefined value is set to a value so that the annunciator is activated when approximately 20% of the bills have been rejected.

23. (New) The gaming machine of claim 22, wherein the predefined value is set to a value so that the annunciator is activated when approximately 30% of the bills have been rejected.

24. (New) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the controller computes an updated bill acceptance rate following each insertion of a bill into the bill acceptor and performs one of activating, deactivating, leaving the annunciator activated, and leaving the annunciator deactivated dependent on a comparison of the updated bill acceptance rate with the predefined value.

25. (New) The gaming machine of claim 24, wherein the gaming machine further comprises a network interface and wherein the controller is in communication with the network interface and communicates signals relating to the bill acceptance rate to the network interface for communication onto a network.

26. (New) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the bill acceptor continues to receive and evaluate each inserted bill according to the same criteria regardless of the value of the computed bill acceptance rate.

27. (New) A method of operating a bill acceptor of a gaming machine, the method comprising:

sensing at least one characteristic of each bill inserted into the bill acceptor;

using at least one sensed characteristic as a basis for a decision as to whether to accept or reject the inserted bill;

maintaining separate counters of the number of bill rejections and bill acceptances;

monitoring a bill acceptance rate of the bill acceptor, the bill acceptance rate being computed depending on the cumulative value of both of the counters and updated following each bill insertion;

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automatically activating an annunciator when the bill acceptance rate over the plurality of bill insertions drops below a predetermined threshold;

continuing to sense the at least one characteristic of bills inserted into the bill acceptor;
and

continuing to operate the activator for the duration that the bill acceptance rate is below the predetermined threshold.

28. (New) The method of claim 27, wherein activating the annunciator when the bill acceptance rate drops below a predetermined threshold comprises activating a visual indicator located in a bill receiving zone of the bill acceptor.

29. (New) The method of claim 28, further comprising continuing to receive and sense each inserted bill according to the same criteria regardless of the value of the monitored bill acceptance rate.